DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 437 389 SP 038 979

AUTHOR	Riley, Dorothy T.
TITLE	Impacts of Shared Decision Making.
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	15p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Attitudes; Elementary Education; Elementary School Teachers; *Participative Decision Making; Principals; *Teacher Administrator Relationship; Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the degree to which a school principal, faculty, and community achieved shared decision making. Through faculty interviews, observations of meetings, and review of the school's documentation of committee structures, the study investigated strengths and weaknesses in the decision-making process. First, participants defined shared decision making. Next, formal and informal structures which were in place to gather teacher input were examined. Participants noted the kinds of decisions that teachers wanted to make and those that they wanted administrators to make. Changes in the decision-making process over time were a focus of inquiry. The study examined how well the current decision-making process was working. Finally, administrators and staff members discussed how to improve the decision-making process. The school did not share a common definition of shared decision making. The way shared decision making was defined by all stakeholders impacted the perception of how well processes were working. Results showed that there is a need to understand the levels of decision making, as well as which decisions will be shared and which ones will not. In this case, the teachers did not want to spend time meeting if they felt that their input was not going to be used. (Contains 24 references.) (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 437 389

Running Head: SHARED DECISION MAKING

Impacts of Shared Decision Making

Dorothy T. Riley

Trace Crossings School Hoover, Alabama

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

SP038979

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D.T. Riley

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Abstract

This qualitative study examined the degree to which a school principal, faculty, and community achieve the goal of shared decision making. The purpose of this study was to provide them with the data needed to help formulate a plan for school improvement. Through interviews of faculty, observations of meetings, and review of the school's documentation of committee structures, the researcher determined strengths and weaknesses in the decision making process. The participants articulated needs for improvement based on their experiences, and these were supplemented using current literature on educational leadership. A critical case methodology was used. Several basic research questions served to direct data collection efforts. First, shared decision making was defined by the participants. Next, both formal and informal structures in place to gather teacher input were examined. The kinds of decisions that teachers want to make and those they want administrators to make were ascertained. Changes in the decision making process over time were a focus of inquiry. The study looked at how well the current decision making process is working. Finally, administration and staff responded to how decision making processes could be improved. The researcher came to three basic conclusions. The way shared decision making is defined by all the stake holders impacts the perception of how well processes are working. There is a need to understand the levels of decision making, as well as which decisions will be shared and which ones will not. Teachers do not want to spend time meeting if they feel that their input is not going to be used.

Impacts of Shared Decision Making

Background

According to the American Association of School Administrators and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, shared decision-making places the responsibility for decisions that will improve learning on those individuals in the school. Through this process, resources are supposed to be redirected to support the goals developed in each school. The strategic planning which leads to goal setting and action plan development should serve to unite the various constituents who then share the accountability for the school. As shared decision making is implemented, teacher morale may improve as new leadership is nurtured at all levels (Myers & Stonehill, 1993).

Hundreds of school districts across the country have experimented with shared decision making. With the reform and restructuring movement in the 1980s, shared decision making became an integral part of many site-based management plans as school districts attempted to decentralize governance. According to Drury (1993), not all such plans have been made voluntarily. In Kentucky, the legislature's 1990 Education Act spelled out the requirements for the makeup of school councils and itemized their responsibilities in school governance. Many other school districts have voluntarily adopted such plans as part of accreditation procedures and for school improvement plans.

Even though shared decision making is becoming law in many places, research continues to indicate that teachers are not being involved in major decisions that affect teaching and learning. Mutchler and Duttweiler (1989) explored the gap between the potential of school-based management and its realization. According to this report, little evidence of long lasting and meaningful changes was found. Teachers were involved only in peripheral issues and parents functioned only in an advisory capacity. Morale and motivation were initially enhanced but effects wore off over time. Mutchler and Duttweiler's study (1989) clearly points to the need

for further research that looks at schools where stake holders are given more active roles in site-based decisions that are important to the daily running of the school.

A factor that contributes to the failure to implement shared decision-making is that it requires a shift in roles for the principal. Principals are faced with learning to involve the staff in collaborative efforts while being bombarded with daily demands that call for quick action on a host of issues. It is not unlike the old adage of having to build the airplane while in mid-flight (Lashway, 1995). But as Marburger (1992) reminds us, the principal's role has always had an important influence on the success of school operation, and that is not likely to change.

Statement of the Problem

The principal's role is changing because of new demands of reform movements that call for broader participation in management of the total school program. School boards and superintendents are being asked to turn over control to the local school community. Many leaders held accountable for school success have little first hand experience in facilitating group decision making. The problem is that school leaders need to know the impact that shared decision making has on a school. Answers to questions such as "Which decisions should be shared?" "Who should be involved in decisions?" and "Who is responsible for school outcomes?" are needed for principals to lead schools into the future.

Research Methods

Case study methodology was selected for this research design. This qualitative approach was chosen because of its descriptive nature (Bogden & Biklen, 1982, Patton, 1990). One school was picked as a critical case to be studied in depth to allow the researcher to describe in rich detail what it is like to work in a school that uses shared decision making and uses it effectively.

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to provide answers to some basic questions that administrators, teachers, and community representatives have as they are faced with participating in making wise decisions that impact their local schools. It will provide data collected about how one actual school community actually operates. The conclusions drawn from the data analysis provide some

practical suggestions that might allow leaders to avoid some pitfalls of implementing shared decision making.

Selected Review of Literature

While the professional literature on shared decision making is extensive, for this study it has been focused. School reform movements were examined because they set the context. The effectiveness of past efforts was explored. Finally, suggestions from the experts on how shared decision-making plans could be improved were studied.

President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education report titled *A Nation at Risk* launched a wave of education reforms in the early 1980s. Advocates called for school reform if the United States was to maintain its competitive edge in the world economy (Cuban, 1990). Midgley and Wood (1993) tell of two phases that this wave of school reform has undergone. First were top down movements (merit pay, career ladders, and mentor programs) were guided by the belief that excellence could be imposed from the top. To this end many states increased graduation requirements, increased the school year, and set higher standards for teachers. In short these centralized efforts at reform were doomed to failure (Bonstingl, 1992). A second phase of this reform movement emerged as it became evident that these mandated efforts were having only minimum effects on the performance of individual schools. With this realization came an emphasis on decentralized decision making efforts similar to models used by successful corporate leaders. Policy makers turned over control to local schools using terms such as site-based management (SBM) to refer to actions taken by school councils and building level teams (Carlson, 1996).

Joyce defined *shared decision making* as "a process in which a variety of members of a school community collaborate in identifying problems, formulating policy, shaping solutions, and implementing decisions" (Joyce, 1986 p. 32). For Harrison, Killion, and Mitchell (1989), it means " creating ownership for those responsible for carrying out decisions by involving them directly in the decision making process - and trusting their abilities and judgments" (p. 55). In defining this process of shared decision making, Marburger (1985), stresses the need for *all* those

involved with that local school to participate in planning. Petterson, Gok, and Warren (1995) say that crucial to the definition of shared decision making is the underlying assumption that those closest to the classroom can make the best decisions about curriculum and instruction.

A compelling case is made for the need for shared decision making. School reform movements have clearly called for it. Business and industry have proven the effectiveness of it. The research mentioned above points to the implication that the school community wants a voice in local school issues. This would lead one to believe that shared decision making would be widespread. This does not seem to be the case. A survey by the Institute for Responsive Education found that 85% of the citizens and educators polled think the amount of participation in education is too little (Marburger, 1992).

According to Marburger, teachers are in agreement. In a separate poll conducted by the National Education Association, over 90% of the teachers in all parts of the country at all levels indicated that more home - school interaction in school matters would be desirable. Weiss (1992) examined the impact of organizational structures for shared decision making on teacher participation, focusing on the types of issues raised and the nature of the changes that were introduced. Findings suggested that teachers do want to have more of a voice in major decisions but feel their influence is usually limited.

The question is why are efforts toward shared decision making not working. Caldwell and Wood (1998) research defined the principal's role as key to the success of efforts aimed at shared decision making. Lumsden (1992) speaks of new principals finding themselves ill-prepared for assuming such complex roles. According to Lumsden's work, the match between formal preservice training and the actual demands inherent in the principalship is not a strong correlation. This is not a newly discovered problem but has been a battle cry for many years because skills required to be an excellent classroom teacher do not perfectly equate with those necessary to perform the many different roles that a principal must fill on any given day. Moreover, one has but to ask a veteran principal to find that mere experience does not provide all the answers for coping with the job of being a school principal.

In giving advise to struggling principals, Patterson (1993) points out that the first thing a leader should do with a group is to develop those shared core values that will be the foundation for decisions, all decisions made by the organization. Next, the group should decide how to decide. It is stressed that this be done together to avoid the power struggles which entangle many organizations. Training the group in consensus building is important as is making time for the decision making process because it does take time. As early as 1970, Miles and Ritchie talked about the importance of looking at the quality and quantity of participation in decision making. Findings from their research showed that managers who valued their subordinates' capabilities least and who rarely sought their contributions had the least satisfied workers. Managers with high trust and confidence in their workers and involved them in making decisions reported consistently higher job satisfaction among workers (Miles & Ritchie, 1970)

In successful shared decision-making schools, according to this research by Peterson, Gok, and Warren, (1995) principals used retreats, conferences, and collaborative projects to build teams and provide continuous training. Another key component that the authors are quick to point out is the need for sufficient time for administrators and teachers to engage in meaningful dialogue that involves reflection. It was stressed that both the formal and informal dialogue has importance in the team building process.

Because of the apparent gap that still exists between what we know about the need to shift decision making in school to those people who work most closely with student, and what research tells us is practice in our schools, there seems to be a real need for more inquiry. The purpose of the current study is to give some viable options through providing a description of how one school has managed to cope. This case study should provide practicing principals with insight into how this school, working within system policy, has developed both formal and informal structures for making decisions.

Research Design

Because the goal of this study was to describe the process of shared decision making in this school in such depth that the reader gains an understanding of what it is like to work in the

school, the study fits into the theoretical tradition known as phenomenology. According to Patton (1980) this form of inquiry is characterized by its holistic view, inductive approach, and naturalistic inquiry. The researcher took the role of observer and documented and described what happens in a school setting.

The school, Park Lane, (all names were changed) was purposefully chosen for the critical case study. As a school accredited under the School Renewal standards of SACS, it provided an opportunity to observe shared decision making in action. The school came highly recommended by university and school leaders in the area.

Data was collected to answer the research question:

How are the structured processes working to insure teacher participation in major decisions at Park Lane School?

Some questions were important in guiding the interviews:

How is shared decision making defined by the people involved?

What formal and informal structures exist for getting input?

How well do they feel it is working?

What happens informally when problems arise?

The researcher gathered data to describe in detail the answers to these and more questions. The study examined what decisions are made, which types of decisions involve which constituents, and which structures provide the most appropriate level of participation at this particular school.

Data collection for the study followed the techniques of observation as described by Spradley (1980). The researcher functioned as the data collector and attended large and small group meetings, sat in on conferences, and observed formal and informal dialogue that occurs in the day-to-day operation of the school. Field notes were written as soon as possible after each visit.

In conjunction with observations, interviews were conducted as a tool for collecting data. The superintendent, the principal, teachers and staff acted as informants. A summary sheet was used to assist the researcher in keeping track of interview data.

Documents that archive the schools' history and background were examined to provide another data source for analysis. Written records that show plans for school improvement and accreditation documentation were an additional data source. The school board policy manual and the faculty handbook each gave the researcher more information regarding the formal structures, chain of command, policies, and procedures critical to the study.

Data were collected using the constant comparative technique until saturation was reached as presented by Bogdan and Biklen (1992). The researcher entered data into computer files as they were collected in field notes that resulted from interviews, observation, and document reviews. At the time of data entry, it was coded using categories from educational leadership theory. As the data collection continued, categories were constantly reviewed and revised. Data were sorted and resorted until patterns become apparent. Conclusions were drawn by the researcher once the data analysis was presented.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of how one school, Park Lane, has coped with putting shared decision making into operation. Interviews, observations, and document reviews yielded data. Data was analyzed using the constant comparative approach.

First, shared decision making was defined by the superintendent, principal, and some teachers. Next both the formal and informal structures in place to gather teacher input were examined. Then the kinds of decisions that teachers want to make and those that they would like administrators to make were ascertained. The impact of shared decision making on faculty morale was explored. Finally, the study looked at how well the current decision making process is working at the school.

Findings, Conclusions, And Recommendations

Summary of Findings

The researcher conducted a single case study for the purpose of providing a rich description of how one school, Park Lane, has implemented shared decision making. Interviews, observations, and document reviews yielded a wealth of data. When these data were closely examined several clear findings resulted.

One finding was that no common definition of shared decision making exists at this school. While some view it as giving input, others see it as allowing groups to make decisions. This factor impacted other aspects of the study. Those who subscribed to the narrower view of just giving input were satisfied that the process was working and saw morale as positive while the other group expressed less satisfaction with how the present structures are working.

A second finding from the examination of the data identified the types of decisions that teachers want to make, and those they prefer to have handled by the school administration. There was consensus that teachers at Park Lane want to make those decisions that most directly effect what happens in their classrooms. They have little desire to participate in decisions that do not pertain specifically to classroom instruction. Literature supports this finding.

The final finding is supported by the research literature done by Keith and Girling (1991). This study showed that teachers want to participate in resolving school problems but they become disillusioned when they felt that their involvement made little difference. Likewise, Park Lane teachers want to know how decisions will be made and who will make them. When this knowledge is lacking teachers feel that their input is not valued or they are being manipulated into thinking they have input when they do not.

Conclusions

According to the participants at Park Lane School, there is not an awareness of the levels of decision making occurring in the school. This is apparent in the definitions given for shared decision making. This one factor impacts many other results of the study.

A second conclusion was that the principal and faculty at Park Lane are interested in improvement. Data from interviews indicated that most of the faculty like and support the principal. The principal and faculty were forthcoming with both descriptions of what is happening at the school and suggestions for improving their decision-making processes.

Another conclusion was that School Renewal, the accreditation plan for the district, supports site based management. As an integral part of School Renewal, Park Lane has a committee structure in place to act as the mechanism for decision making. The formal decision making structures are solid and viable.

Finally, data pointed to the overall conclusion that while Park Lane School is recognized as an avant garde school, evidence from this study indicates that most decisions fall within the first three levels on Patterson's continuum. This is outside of the range of what is typically considered as shared decision making (Patterson, 1993).

Recommendations for Further Study

One suggestion for further study would be to conduct a follow-up study at this same school in three to five years. The same interview questions would be used along with similar data analysis. The results of that study would provide data to formulate a new plan for improvement to take the school forward for three to five years.

Worthwhile means for evaluating what actually happens in a school regarding decision making is extremely hard to obtain. The methods used in this study offer some direction that might prove valuable to a principal and school who are interested in getting more in depth understanding of what is really being experienced by those most directly impacted by the school. Duplicating this study at other schools could provide just such data needed for those planning improvements.

Finally, studies like this one could greatly benefit universities that offer preservice and inservice training for teachers and administrators. Chalker (1992), in his writing about a vision of tomorrow's schools, pointed toward a need for this refocusing and redirecting the roles of teachers and school leaders. Principals who have not received recent training frequently need

help in adjusting from exercising total control toward sharing responsibility with the entire school community.

Summary

The qualitative research study conducted at Park Lane school has provided the faculty, principal, and community with the results needed to help them formulate their own unique plan for school improvement. They now know which decisions teachers want to make and which ones they want the principal to make. Their accreditation plan, School Renewal, supports site based decision-making, and provides the framework for involvement. With an understanding of the different levels of decision making and some basic consensus building training, this school will be ready to lead the state as a model for meaningful school improvement and true school renewal.

References

Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S. (1982). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and method. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bonstingl, J. (1992). Schools of quality: An introduction to total quality management in education. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Caldwell, S. & Wood, F. (1988, October). School-based improvement - are we ready? Educational Leadership, 46 (2): 50-53.

Carlson, R. (1996). Reframing & reform: Perspectives on organization, leadership, and school change. White Plains, N.Y.: Longman Publishers.

Chalker, D. (1992, November). Refocusing school leadership for the 21st century across the board. Educational Digest, 58, 4.

Cuban, L. (1990). Reforming again, again, and again. Educational Research, 19 (1): 3-13.

Drury, W. (1993, September). The principal's role in site-based management. Principal, 73 (1): 16 - 19.

Harrison, C., Killion, J., and Mitchell, J. (1989, May). Site-base management: The realities of implementation. Educational Leadership, 48:55-58.

Joyce, B. (1986). Improving America's Schools. New York: Longman, Inc.

Keith, S. & Girling, R. (1991). Education, management, and participation. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Lashway, L. (1995, May). Can instructional leaders be facilitative leaders? ERIC Digest, 98. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Lumsden, L. (1992, December). Prospects in principal preparation. ERIC Digest,72. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Marburger, C. (1992). One school at a time: School based management - A process for change. Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Midgley, C. & Wood, S. (1993). Beyond site-based management: Empowering teachers to reform schools. Phi Delta Kappan,75:245-252.

Miles, R. & Ritchie, J. (1970, Autumn). An analysis of quantity and quality of participation as mediating variables in participative decision make process. Personal Psychology: 342.

Mutchler, S. & Duttweiler, P. (1989). Implementing shared decision making in site-based management: barriers to changing traditional behavior. Austin, TX: Southwest Education Development Laboratory.

Myers, D. & Stonehill, R. (1993, January). School-based management. Education research consumer guide, Number 4. Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Owens, R. (1970). Organizational behavior in schools. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Patterson, J. (1993). Leadership for tomorrow's schools. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Patton, M. (1980). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. Newburg Park, CA: Sage Publishing.

Patton, M. (1990). Qualitative evaluation methods (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing, Inc.

Peterson, K., Gok, K., & Warren, V. (1995). Principals' skills and knowledge for shared decision-making. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Spradley, J. (1980). Participant observation. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Weiss, C., Cambone, J., & Wyeth, A. (1992, August). Trouble in paradise: Teacher conflicts in shared decision making. Educational Administration Quarterly, 28, (3): 350-67.